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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to analyze the conditions under which adolescents agree with their parents and/or friends on specific political topics in the Federal Republic of Germany. Respondents were 136 father-mother-adolescent triads in West Berlin. The adolescent sample was evenly divided by gender, the age ranged between 12 and 18 years. In addition, 153 pairs of friends were also interviewed. Parents, adolescents, and peers were asked the same questions concerning six political issues: their political interest, their party identification, their attitudes toward nuclear power plants, their attitudes toward the peace movement, their attitudes toward guest workers (Turks, etc.) and their attitudes toward women's liberation. The results revealed that the influence of mothers was highest in regard to general political interest and partisanship and on the issue of deporting foreign workers. The influence of fathers was highest in regard to partisanship and on the issue of foreign workers. Depending on topic, there were same-gender influences as well as cross-gender influences. Friends were similar in attitudes toward nuclear power plants and the peace movement. In sum, parents were influential in generating political interest and in general political topics. Adolescents were similar in issues which attract young people in most western societies. Political interest of parents, close relationships within the family, and homogeneity of the parents' political opinions increased the influence of parents. (Author/NB)

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ADOLESCENTS BETWEEN MOTHERS, FATHERS AND PEERS: SIMILARITIES IN POLITICAL ATTITUDES IN WEST GERMANY

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Adolescents between mothers, fathers and peers: Similarities in political attitudes in West Germany

Hans Oswald, Raimund Stündel

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the conditions under which adolescents agree with their parents and/or their friends on specific political topics in the Federal Republic of Germany. Respondents were 136 father-mother-adolescent-triads in West Berlin. The adolescent sample was evenly divided by gender, the age ranged between 12 and 18 years. In addition, we interviewed 153 pairs of friends.

The influence of mothers was highest in regard to general political interest and partisanship and on the issue of deporting foreign workers. The influence of fathers was highest in regard to partisanship and on the issue of foreign workers. Depending on topic there are same-gender influences as well as cross-gender influences. Friends are similar in attitudes toward nuclear power plants and towards the peace movement. In sum: Parents are influencal in generating political interest and in general political topics. Adolescents are similiar in issues which attract young people in most western societies.

Political interest of parents, close relationships within the family and homogeneity of the parent's political opinions increase the influence of parents.

Similarities in Political Attitudes in West Germany

by

Hans Oswald and Raimund Stuendel

1. The Problem

During the past decades the judgement upon the relevance of parents for the political socialization of their children has undergone various changes. Whereas in the 50ies studies, based on group comparisons, seem to point at a high correspondence between parents and their offspring, studies conducted during the 60ies and 70ies, using a dyadic or triadic design, showed at the most only medium agreement between parents and their children (Connell 1972, Oswald/Völker 1973, Jennings/Niemi 1974 and 1981). But recent reanalysis of these data with more intricate statistical methods showed in contrast to simple correlation analysis again a high correspondence (Acock/Bengtson 1978, Niemi/Newman/Weimer 1982, Dalton 1982).

As the pioneer work of Jennings/Niemi (1974) has shown, it is of great importance that in studying the influence of parents on the political attitudes of their children a variety of intervening variables be considered. Since then varying studies have aided in extracting important variables.

The political interest of parents was not found to increase the correspondence (with the exception of party identification) (Jennings/Niemi 1974); but correspondence does increase when the discussed political issue is considered important by the parents (Tedin 1980, Oswald 1980).

Homogenous political attitudes of the parents increased the agreement with the teenagers in case of specific political topics (Jennings/Niemi 1974, Oswald/Völker 1973); this was not to be found for basic political issues like political interest and political trust (Jennings/Niemi 1974, Oswald 1980).

In contrast with traditional views, mothers seem to be more succesful in influencing their children than fathers (Jennings/Niemi 1974, Jennings/Jansen 1976, Acock/Bengtson 1978, Oswald 1980, Niemi/Newman/Weimer 1982), especially if they have a high job qualification (Acock et al 1982).

Differences between male and female children due to sex are not very strong but there seems to be higher correspondence between girls and parents than between boys and their parents in the US (Jennings/Niemi 1974). In a West German study of 1968, a stronger same sex correspondence was found (Oswald 1980).

Correspondence with peers is much lower than correspondence with parents (Tedin 1980). A West German study confirmed this result with the exception of political interest, where correspondence with friends was higher than with parents (Oswald/Völker 1973).

Based on this results for the US und West Germany we try to answer the following questions for a 1986 West Berlin sample of father-mother-child triads:

1. Do parents influence the political attitudes of their offsprings?
2. Are there gender differences in the parental influence?
3. Are parents more successful if their political attitudes are homogenous?
4. Does the parents' influence depend on their political interest?
5. Does the parents' influence depend on the emotional relationship between them and their children?
6. Do adolescents tend to agree with their friends on political attitudes?

2. Method

The data analyzed in this paper were collected as part of a large, representative, multi-purpose survey in West Berlin in 1986. Our analyses are based on a subset of 136 married couples

(adult German citizens) with adolescent children aged twelve to eighteen. The 136 fathers, mothers, and adolescents were interviewed separately. In this way we were able to analyze answers of 136 father-mother-child-triads to measure agreement within the family (see Jennings/Niemi 1974 and Oswald 1980 for a similar research design).

At a certain point in the interview the adolescents were asked to name their best same-sex friend because we wanted to interview this friend as well. Some refused to give a name, and some named friends who refused to do an interview. However, we were finally able to conduct 153 best-friend interviews. We were therefore able to analyze and compare answers from 153 pairs of best friends (see Kandel 1986 for a similar strategy of analysis).

The adolescent interviews were conducted by interviewers who were of the same sex as the adolescents. All interviews were conducted at the respondent's home using a structured questionnaire. The first adult interviews were conducted by a private survey research company; the second parent interviews as well as the adolescent and the friend interviews were conducted by a team of trained interviewers under the supervision of the first author.

The background characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The parent sample consists of 136 fathers and 136 mothers. The adolescent sample is almost evenly split between boys (46%) and girls (54%). The average age of mothers is 43.3 years, the average age of fathers is 46.7 years. The average age of students is 15.5 years, ranging from twelve to eighteen.

The head of the household in the majority of families (69 %) had a middle or lower-middle white-collar job, 20 % had either a blue-collar or a very low white-collar job, 10 % were professionals or higher level civil servants. In general, the sample of parent-adolescent-triads of German families with children aged twelve to eighteen in West Berlin is slightly middle class biased.

Insert Table 1 about here

Measures: we asked parents, adolescents and peers the same questions concerning six political issues: their political interest, their party identification, their attitude towards nuclear power plants, towards the peace movement, towards guest workers (Turks etc.) and towards women's liberation.

3. Results

3.1 Political interest

Adults are more politically interested than teenagers, men are more interested than women, and boys show more interest than girls. 68% of all fathers and 39% of the mothers showed very strong or strong political interest, but only 22% of the boys and 15% of the girls[1]. For juveniles the highest amount of political interest is found at the highest track called "Gymnasium" (boys 33%, $R = -.27$, $p < .05$; girls 23%, $R = -.19$, $p < .10$).

Insert Table 2 about here

Highest agreement was found between son and mother ($R = .40$, $p < .001$). Correspondence was lower for son and father ($R = .28$, $p < .05$). For girls no significant agreement was found with either parent. Close emotional relationships between parents and children do not increase the correspondence.

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1 Oswald/Völker (1973, 144) for 1968 and Jennings/Niemi (1981, 406) for 1965 and 1973 found practically identical percentages for parents, whereas pupils on Gymnasium claimed twice as often to be strongly politically interested than the adolescents questioned in our study.

The combined interest of both parents correlates significantly with their children.

Insert Table 3 about here

The most powerful predictor of the male adolescent's political interest is the combined interest of both his parents. If both parents are interested, 53% of the boys are interested too, if both parents are not interested, only 6% of the boys showed political interest. The strong impact of the mother could be seen here again: when the interested mother joins the interested father, the percentage of interested sons increases from 14% to 53%.

For peers, a correspondence could only be found for male friends ($R = .28$, $p < .01$). As seen before for the absolute figures, again agreement is highest between best friends who visit the Gymnasium. This could be shown for both sexes (male friends: $R = .45$, $p < .05$; female friends: $R = .30$, $p < .05$).

Insert Table 4 about here

In the regression analysis only the calculations for the boys lead to a satisfying model. As a dependent variable we used the political interest of boys, as independent ones the combined political interest of both parents, education of father, and age and educational track of the boys. SES was not included in the equation due to a non-linear correlation with political interest.

Insert Table 5 about here

The reason for the minus sign at "age of boy" and "education of father" is the way of coding "political interest". The older the boys and the higher the education of the father, the more interested the boys are.

3.2 Party identification

Whereas the party identification of mothers (76%) and fathers (80%) is within the frame of common voting polls in West Germany. only 26% of the girls and 33% of the boys state that they lean towards a particular political party.

Political interest of the juveniles raises the probability of naming a party identification for the girls to 40% and for boys to 54%, but does not influence leaning towards a specific political party.

There is no corellation between party identification and political interest, age, educational track or SES of the adolescents..

The most important variable for the prognosis of party identification of juveniles is the party identification of their parents[2]:

Insert Table 6 about here

If both parents lean towards the SPD, the number of juveniles who also choose this party shows an increase from 22% to 33%, if both parents state to prefer the CDU, increase is from 39% to 52%.

---

2 For party identification we found a high correspondence between mothers and fathers. Two thirds of all parents share the same party identification ($Ch^1 2 = 83.43$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .51$).

Insert Table 7 about here

Insert Table 8 about here

Such high agreement between parents and juveniles on party identification has by now been shown for decades to be a stable result of empirical studies in the US and the FRG (Oswald/Völker 1973, 127; Jennings/Niemi 1974, 38; Tedin 1974, 158; Jennings/Allerbeck/Rosenmayr 1979, 463; Jennings/Niemi 1981, 90; Dalton 1982, 143; Allerbeck/Hoag 1985, 142). In our study mothers have an equally strong influence as fathers but tend to agree more with sons than with daughters. They are particularly effective in passing their party identification if they are politically interested. For fathers too agreement with the opposite sex is found to be stronger - which differs from results obtained by Jennings/Niemi (1974, 171), who encountered same-sex parent-child orientation.

For N (N = 14) being to small, statements about the correspondence with friends can not be made.

3.3 Attitude towards the building of nuclear power plants

Our question was: who is against the building of nuclear power plants, and what circumstances increase this rate?

Of those asked, more females than males rejected nuclear power plants: 57% of mothers, 42% of fathers, 74% of the girls and 55% of the boys[3].

3 Allerbeck/Hoag (1985, 137) report a clearly lower quote of rejection for the adolescents they studied: 10% wanted all nuclear power plants to be turned off, 53% wanted a construction stop and 34% stated that they would want more nuclear power plants to be build.

The political interest of the adolescents has no influence upon their attitude towards this question. The type of school attented by the adolescents has influence only on the boys. 71% of the Gesamtschüler (comprehensive school) take a negative stand towards nuclear power plants whereas for those in other tracks less rejection was found (51%). Boys sympathising with youth movements show significantly more rejection than those who do not sympathize ($R = .26$, $p < .001$). Also boys, who often quarrel with their mother show higher rejection ($R = .28$, $p < .05$).

To discuss the direct influence of parents on their children: A strong impact comes from politically interested fathers. Their attitude correlates very significantly with that of their children ($R = .37$, $p < .001$), which is not the case for mothers. The combined attitude of father and mother do not increase agreement any further, but it is higher in cases in which parents and children report to have a good emotional relationship with each other.

Since in the regression model for the girls only one variable was included which more over only explains 8% of the variance we here limit ourselves to the model for the boys. As a dependent variable we took the attitude of the boy, as independent variable the attitude of mother and father, the political interest of mother and father, the educational level of mother and son, sympathy of the boy with youth movements and quarrel of the son with his mother.

Insert Table 9 about here

The regression analysis confirms the results of the bivariate correlation analysis, especially the strong rejection of nuclear power plants by Gesamtschüler and the high impact of the attitude of the father. Also confirmed is the correlation with sympathy for youth movements and quarrel with mother. This leads to the

conclusion that there is a tendency to higher rejection of nuclear power plants with increasing distance from parental home and parental norms.

Male friends agree more on this issue ($R = .39$, $p < .001$) than female friends ($R = .18$, $p = < .10$). As seen before in case of political interest, agreement is highest between friends who visit the Gymnasium ($R = .45$, $p < .001$, $N = 61$).

3.4 Attitude towards the peace movement

A generally strong positive attitude towards the peace movement is found, even though for fathers this is somewhat lower. Of the mothers 77% agree with the goals of the peace movement, and 57% of the fathers. Girls show more often a positive attitude (83%) than boys (76%).

The correlation between attitudes of children and parents is significant only if a good emotional relationship is reported and/or political interest of the parents exists. A correspondence between the combined attitude of both parents and their offspring was not found.

Since bivariate correlations between the attitude of adolescents and parents existed only for politically interested parents, we calculated regression models only for the children of politically interested mothers and fathers. The model for fathers did not yield a satisfying result. This is why in the follwing we only present the model for politically interested mothers. As a dependent variable we used the attitude of the teenager, as independent variables we took the attitude of the mother, the educational track of the adolescents and sympathy with youth movements.

Insert Table 10 about here

The minus sign in the column of "sympathy for youth movements" is due to the way of coding this variable. Sympathy fosters a positive attitude towards the peace movement.

The correspondence for friends is moderately high both for male ($R = .27$, $p < .05$) and female ($R = .26$, $p < .05$) friends.

3.5 Attitude towards guest workers (Turks etc)

For the attitude towards guest workers we found no sex differences. 39% of the mothers, 40% of the fathers, 49% of the girls and 54 % of the boys do clearly reject the statement: "Foreign workers should be deported so that German workers can get German jobs."

A high educational level of the family members and political interest of the adolescent increase the tolerance towards guest workers. We found a strong same sex correspondence between parents and their offspring (mother - daughter: $R = .31$, $p < .01$; father - son: $R = .34$, $p < .01$). Political interest of parents does not increase the agreement between them and the teenagers, but a good emotional relationship does. The combined attitude of both parents is also significantly related to the adolescents attitude ($R = .26$, $p < .01$).

For regression analysis we used the attitude of the child as a dependent variable, and as independent variables we took education of mother, political interest of child and fathers attitude (mothers attitude and the combined attitude of the parents were not included in the equation).

Insert Table 11 about here

Male friends have similiar attitudes ($R = .27$, $p < .05$), girls have not.

3.6 Attitude towards the women's liberation movement

That women would reject the statement "Women are not found in leading positions because they themselves do not want to be there" much more strongly than men seemed a plausible hypothesis but could not be shown. 42% of the mothers and 35% of the fathers, 49% of the girls and 56% of the boys clearly rejected the above statement. Politically interested adolescents reject the statement much stronger than those not interested ($r = -.20$, $p < .001$).

No agreement could be found between the attitude of parents und adolescents.

The regression analysis shows useful results only for girls. We used the attitude of the girls as the dependent variable and the political interest of the girl, the attachment to girl friends and mother's attitude as independent variables.

Insert Table 12 about here

We like to stress that the attitude of the mother has no influnce upon the daughter's opinion towards the women's liberation movement. Influencial was only the political interest of the girls and the trust in the advice of a girl friend.

There is no correlation between the attitudes of best friends neither for girls nor for boys.

4. Summary

1. Parents generally influence the political attitudes of their offspring except for the attitude towards womens' liberation movement.

2. Gender differences: The influence of mothers equals that of fathers. On party identification they have the same influence. Fathers are more influencial in topics such as nuclear power plants and guest workers. Mothers are more influencial in topics such as peace movement and political interest.

There is more agreement between sons and parents than between daughters and parents.

3. For political interest and party identification parents are more succesful in influencing their offspring if their attitudes are homogenous.

4. The more politically interested parents are the higher the agreement between the attitudes of parents and children towards party identification, peace movement and nuclear power plants.

5. A good emotional relationship between parents and their offspring has the strongest impact of all intervening variables on agreement between them.

6. Male friends generally agree on political interest and on most political topics. Female friends agree only on the peace movement.

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TABLES

Table 1: **Sample Description**

PARENTS (N=136)

Age	%	%
	Mothers	Fathers
31-40	32	18
41-50	57	60
51 and more	10	22

Social class[1]	%
upper middle	10
middle	37
lower middle	32
upper lower	18
lower lower	2

[1] Occupation of head of household

ADOLESCENTS (N=136)

Sex	%
Males	46
Females	54

Age	%
12-13	26
14-15	39
16-18	35

Type of School	%
Hauptschule	3
Realschule	13
Gesamtschule	21
Gymnasium	46
other	18

Table 2: **Political interest of parents and their offspring**

	Mother	Father	Adolescents female	Adolescents male
Very strong/Strong	39	68	15	22
Not so strong/ None	61	32	85	78
% =	100	100	100	100
N =	136	136	73	63

Table 3: **Relationship between mothers' and fathers' political interest and the political interest of their children**

	The child is interested	The child is not interested	%	N
The parents are				
both interested	26	74	100	42
partly interested	18	82	100	62
both not interested	9	91	100	32
N	25	111		136

chi^2 = 13,19 p <.01 r = .16

(sons: r = .42, p <.001; daughters: r = .09, n.s.)

Table 4: **Relationship between best friends' political interest**

	First friend is interested	First friend is not interested	
Second friend is interested	42	18	
not interested	58	82	
%	100	100	
N	36	117	153

$chi^2 = 7.34$ $p <= .01$ $r = .24$

Table 5: **Model to explain political interest of boys**

$N = 63$ $R^2 = .37$ $F = 11.79$ $p(F) < .001$

	B	SE B	Beta	T	SIG T
1. Political interest of both parents (combined)	.40	.09	.45	4.39	.0000
2. Age of boy	-.14	.04	-.40	-3.88	.0003
3. Education of the father	-.15	.07	-.24	-2.30	.0249

Table 6: **Party identification of mothers, fathers and children**

Child	*Mother* SPD	CDU	small/no party		*Father* SPD	CDU	small/no party	
SPD	21	3	3		23	3	3	
CDU	2	44	11		2	35	3	
small/no party	77	53	87		75	63	94	
%	100	100	101		100	101	100	
N	47	34	37	118*	44	40	36	120*

chi^2 = 26,40 $p < .001$ Cramers V = .38

chi^2 = 25,85 $p < .001$ Cramers V = .38

* Sample reduction by "no answers"

Table 7: **Party identification: both parents vs. child**

	Child SPD	not SPD	%	N
both parents SPD	33	67	100	30
one parent SPD	0	100	100	31
both parents not SPD	3	97	100	70
				131

chi^2 = 27,53 $p < .001$ Cramers V = .46

Table 8: **Party identification: both parents vs. child**

	Child CDU	not CDU	%	N
both parents CDU	52	48	100	23
one parent CDU	18	82	100	28
both parents not CDU	4	96	100	80
				131

$chi^2 = 32,57$ $p < .001$ Cramers V = .50

Table 9: **Model to explain boys' attitude towards nuclear power plants**

N = 48 $R^2 = .42$ F = 7.68 p(F)< .001

	B	SE B	Beta	T	SIG T
1. Track* of the child	-1.14	.32	-.43	-3.61	.0008
2. Attitude of the father	.34	.11	.38	3.13	.0032
3. Sympathy for youth movements	.80	.41	.24	1.95	.0575
4. Conflicts with the mother	.40	.23	.22	1.78	.0827

* Track: 1 = Comprehensive school
0 = others

Table 10: **Model to explain children's attitude towards the peace movement (children of political interested mothers only)**

N = 41 R^2 = .35 F = 6.77 p(F)< .001

	B	SE B	Beta	T	SIG T
1. Attitude of the mother	.33	.12	.36	2.64	.0122
2. Sympathy for youth movements	-.76	.34	-.30	-2.25	.0308
3. Track* of the child	.67	.32	.28	2.09	.0438

* Track: 1 = Comprehensive school
0 = others

Table 11: **Model to explain children's attitude towards guest workers (Turks etc.)**

N = 119 R^2 = .19 F = 8.82 p (F)< .001

	B	SE B	Beta	T	SIG T
1. Education of the mother	.26	.08	.29	3.40	.0009
2. Political interest of the child	-.21	.08	-.22	-2.63	.0097
3. Attitude of the father	.14	.07	.17	2.02	.0454

Table 12: **Model to explain girls' attitude towards women's liberation**

N = 67 R^2 = .37 F = 12.13 p(F)< .001

	B	SE B	Beta	T	SIG T
1. Political interest of the girl	-.42	.08	-.54	-5.38	.0000
2. Attachment to girl friends	-.25	.11	-.22	-2.15	.0352
(3. Attitude of the mother	.05	.06	.08	.76	.4494)